
The Passing of the Manchus by Percy Horace Kent

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NOTES AND REVIEWS

The Passing of the Manchus. By PERCY HORACE KENT, M.A. (Oxon), Legal Adviser to the Taotai of Industries in the Province of Chihli, China. New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1912.

By this volume Mr. Kent has increased the public's indebtedness to him for a sensible clear and sympathetic narrative of the great events enacting in new China. His earlier work, *Railway Enterprise in China*, warranted us in looking for a second well-wrought task, and these expectations have been fulfilled. Both these books are invaluable to all such readers as wish to follow intelligently the absorbing modern drama of China in development.

The *Railway Enterprise* traces the history of China's dealings with foreign financiers seeking railway and kindred concessions, cajoling, bargaining and intriguing,—often with the dollar diplomacy of their honorable governments applying “pressure” to support them. The story as Mr. Kent tells it extenuates nothing, while free from animus or partiality. The documents and agreements are set before us, so that we may form our own judgment of China's impotence or worse, and of the moral standards of “business” in Christendom! Alas, even for our own country we have to blush with shame and indignation. But the author is ever the dispassionate narrator—no more. His book, while not lacking a lawyer's analysis, is pervaded withal by a style so good that even the ordinary reader, and not alone the railway expert, is carried along as in the current of an interesting tale. And when he lays down the book at last, the reader has become most curious to know the sequel of the complications in which harassed China had become entangled. This he will find in *The Passing of the Manchus*. In the earlier chapters of this book, he will find a close connection with Mr. Kent's former work; and he will learn the *dénouement* of the railway story in the popular agitations of Hunan, the unanimous revolt of Sz Chuan, and the dramatic downfall of the Minister, Sheng Kung-pao. But after all, momentous as were these events, they are only a single feature in the history of the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty. We have given to them this

prominence because they constitute so natural and interesting a sequel to Mr. Kent's *Railway Enterprise*.

We turn now without further delay to the other and wider value of the book which forms the subject of the present notice. Here is a narrative of the causes and events which led to the uprising of October, 1911, at Wuchang, of the unavailing efforts of the Peking government to suppress it, of the growth of the rebellion within a few weeks into a revolution which set up its own capital, its own president, its own congress, and speedily effected the abdication of the Manchu regent, Prince Chun. Meanwhile, we witness the dramatic re-entry of Yuan Shih-kai upon the national stage; then come the pregnant negotiations at Shanghai between Yuan's envoys on behalf of the Manchu monarchy and the revolution's representatives,—the latter demanding nothing less than the abdication of the emperor, the resignation of the imperial house forever, and the establishment of a republic. The steps by which Yuan—convinced at length that the monarchy cannot be saved—brings about Manchu renunciation of the throne, acquiescence in the republic, and the transference of governmental authority in strictly legal form, are vividly related. Next follows the election of Yuan as provisional president, the disinterested and patriotic self-effacement of Sun Yat Sen, and the establishment of the new government at Peking—after much discussion of the claim that the capital ought to be Nanking, as it had been in the first portion of the Ming era. The last part of the book is largely (and necessarily) devoted to the efforts of the new regime to reach an agreement with the International syndicate and obtain a foreign loan. The narrative is brought down to the end of August, 1912, at which time the loan negotiations were still uncompleted.

Throughout his task the author has enjoyed a marvellous field for the description of dramatic incidents in rapid and surprising succession, and for frequent discussions and conclusions of a judicial kind. The events of the *coup d'etat* of 1898 claim his consideration, and the still vexed question of Yuan's loyalty at that crisis—so tremendous an issue for him. The writer seems to think, as we do, that had the Empress Dowager lived, the monarchy would not have fallen, and China would not be a doubtful republic today. He reveals to us the revolutionaries at work behind the scenes for years before the rebellion actually broke out. We are given glimpses of Sun Yat Sen's activity in inciting the Chinese students and others, in Japan and other foreign countries, against the Manchus; we see Liang Chi-chao and Sun Chiao-jen stirring

their fellow countrymen to political thought by means of the new and free press. We believe that no reader, whether of the class already familiar with China, or of those who have hitherto cared little for far-eastern affairs, can drop this book till he has read it through; the situations are too startling, the actors too various and too human, the plot too momentous not to absorb our undivided interest. And when the drama closes, we are challenged by the greatest of all present world questions: Will the new government maintain itself, and secure the prolonged confidence and support of the Chinese nation? If not so, then what is to be the outcome? To these questions Mr. Kent addresses himself in his concluding chapter, "Quo Vadis." Here the various chances of the near future are marshalled one by one and examined. The diverse conditions and influences now prevalent in China are set forth and weighed. There is anxiety but not cynicism, hopefulness but no gushing optimism. The present reviewer refrains from marring this fair comprehensive and lucid analysis by an attempt to condense it.

In closing a far from optimistic forecast our author writes: "The belief is entertained, however, that the inherent soundness of the race, which has weathered so many storms, may be relied upon ultimately to realise and follow the wiser way. In the meantime the West may well extend to China a patient and well-informed sympathy, remembering that if, like Pandora, the revolutionaries have liberated a cloud of troubles, there also fluttered forth from the fateful box the radiant vision of Hope."

Why, then, has America for the past twelvemonth violated her former traditions and turned the cold shoulder on the new China's plea for mere recognition? It were a small boon, and we might have helped so her much! Have we ceased to act for ourselves, and are we permitting Europe and Japan to think and to decide for us?

E. B. DREW.